

THE STAR.

FEAR NOT.

Men may frown, and men may scoff—
Fear not!
If you cast all weakness off,
Taking sides with Right and Truth,
Victory will come forsooth—
Fear not!
Life has not all sunny skies—
Fear not!
Often in the dark cloud lies
Brightest sunshine. Ill is good
Of, when rightly understood—
Fear not!
Proudest monuments are those—
Fear not!
Which from noble actions rose;
All brave men may build them high
Crowned with flowers that never die—
Fear not!
Courage is the good man's shield—
Fear not!
Cowardice can never yield
Honors which we all would wear;
Cowardice begets despair—
Fear not!
Shun the evil, seek the right—
Fear not!
Truth is honor truth is might;
Firmly stand by all that's true;
Scorn the false. In all you do,
Fear not!
Fear was never made for those—
Fear not!
Who the wrong and false oppose;
He who acts thus wins the prize;
Life immortal in the skies—
Fear not!

ROSE FANE'S TRIAL.

[CONTINUED.]

I declare, my little wife, replied Charley, languidly, you have solved what has always been to me a great difficulty—the mystery of my own character. I believe you are right. I am weak-minded; every one seems to do what he likes with me; but I will endeavour to improve.

There seems to be more hope for wicked men than for weak ones, sighed poor Rose. What a doctrine! laughed her husband; you must have a course of orthodox reading, Rose; your philosophy is all wrong.

So he laughed away her warnings and serious words. Charley Fane was not a drinker, nor a gambler; he was weak, easily led, and seemingly without those firm, strong principles which should be as a rock for every one to lean upon.

The shadow grew deeper and deeper. The time came at length when poor Rose began to dread the approach of evening. They dined together at seven. It was almost pitiful to note the young wife's anxiety as the hour drew near. Dinner was always so neatly and so tastefully prepared, the table ornamented with flowers, the windows thrown open for the fragrant breeze—no home could be more happy. As seven drew near, Rose would go to the window, she would walk down the garden path, stand under the tall lilac trees, and look down the road. There would be no sign of him. Faint and sick at heart she would sit down to her solitary dinner, and watch the night through for him.

It was lonely beyond all words: hour after hour would strike, the sunbeams die away in the glowing West, the birds cease their singing, the flowers bend their dewy heads, the pale pure stars gleam in the evening sky. Yet, still all alone the young wife would pace wearily up and down the room. She could not read nor work at those times. Her whole heart and soul were in one tumult of alarm.

Long after midnight had struck, Charley would come home, looking very flushed and handsome. He would scold her in a good-humoured way for sitting up, telling her she should go to sleep when the flowers did. To do him justice, Charley had the sweetest and easiest temper ever known. He never answered poor Rose's reproaches and reproaches impatiently. He seemed to take life altogether as a grand joke, and that light view of things jarred upon her earnest sensitive nature.

Try and think Charley, she would say to him, life is not the pleasant jest you make of it; one must be earnest sometimes.

You think enough for both of us would be the laughing reply.

Sometimes, however, he would tell her how the head of the firm of which he was manager, would speak gravely to him of his faults, his easy careless disposition.

The bright smiles had begun to fade from Rose Fane's sweet face. She made no complaint. To her mother and the world at large she spoke of Charley as the best of men. She did not like owning, even to herself that he had faults. True and good, she never named them to another.

CHAPTER III.

So two years passed and it seemed to Rose Fane that her happiness had drawn to an end. Charley was too amiable and easy tempered ever to speak aught but kindly to her; but her trust and faith in him were broken, her confidence destroyed.

Mr. Fane had recently made the acquaintance of a Mr. Sinclair. He was a man of some wealth, but no great reputation. His money had been made by betting. He was the "bete noir" of every wife and mother in Burton. He not only drank much himself, but he persuaded others to do so, and then easily won bets and wagers.

Charley was delighted with him. He enjoyed his wild stories, and wilder sallies; from him he learned gambling, in all its branches. Once he took him home to the Laurels to dinner; then for a short time, he saw him in his true light. The stories that had seemed so witty when told around the wine-table, appeared coarse and vulgar when related before his gentle, fair young wife. The wit that had charmed him seemed to fade into mere flippancy beneath her pure calm gaze. Rose took an intense dislike to Sinclair. She felt instinctively that he was her husband's greatest enemy.

Rather pretty, that little wife of yours, said Mr. Sinclair to Charley, when Rose left them together; rather pretty but given to preaching, I should imagine. I never allow my wife that privilege.

I will thank you not to speak so of my wife, said Charley, haughtily. Whatever she may be given to, I will trouble you to keep your remarks respecting her to yourself.

His friend affected to laugh and treat the matter as a joke, but in his heart he vowed deep and bitter hatred against both husband and wife.

From the time of Charley Fane's introduction to Mr. Sinclair he changed considerably for the worse. Hitherto his greatest fault had been his too easy, careless way of yielding to every one; his absence of self-reliance and a want of earnestness painful to those who loved him best. Had he met with a true, noble, sincere friend, he would have benefited by it—he would have been led to better things; meeting with a bad one, he went rapidly on the downward path. He became infatuated with gambling; and no sooner was he released from business than he rushed off to join Mr. Sinclair. Then came weary vigils for the lonely wife, whose sweet face grew more wistful and sad every day. People began to talk about Charley Fane and wonder how it was that with such habits he still continued manager of the largest and best business in the county.

One evening—will Rose Fane ever forget the time?—Charley was late, as usual. It was in the middle of the bright month of June. He had kissed his wife that morning, and told her he should be home by seven, and would take her out. Rose knew too well the value of his promises to have much faith in them; but a faint hope such as never quite dies in the heart of a true wife—a faint hope came that he might keep his word, and the future be fairer than she dared to believe. But seven and eight o'clock passed—there came no Charley. The evening was warm and bright—the air was filled with perfume. Out in the garden the roses bloomed; the white hawthorn clustered on the hedges, the purple violets mingled their fragrance with that of the mignonette and jessamine; a faint breeze stirred the drooping blossoms of the golden laburnum, and bent the plumed lilacs. It was one of the delicious evenings given to earth to remind one of that brighter land, where flowers eternal bloom. Through the long warm hours the young wife sat in the pretty garden, alone. Tears dimmed her bright eyes when she remembered her short dream of happiness, so soon over. She thought of Charley as she had first known him, and as he was now. She was too loyal and true to think of Paul, whose love would have been a shield to her.

I must be brave, she thought,—brave and patient unto the end.

Sad and sorrowful were her musings among the flowers. The golden sunbeams died out at length. The little maid came to say that tea was waiting; still Rose did not move. She watched the moon rise and the pale stars come out and glimmer in the darkened sky.

It was the church clock, ringing out the hour of eleven, that roused her,—eleven, and there was no sign of her husband. The night air grew chilly, and she went in-doors. An indelible nervous dread seized her,—a foreboding—a presentment of coming evil. Twelve, one, and two rang out in the clear night air. She heard footsteps at last, slow and heavy. Rose went quickly to the gate—it was her husband; she met him

there, and gazed in speechless alarm at the ghastly face upon which the moonlight fell.

What is it? she cried, but he spoke no word. He took her hand in his, and led her into the house. What is it, Charley? she cried again, tell me,—what is the matter? I cannot bear to see you so.

His white lips moved, but he could not speak. Never had Rose gazed upon a face so full of wild despair as his. She knelt by him and clasped her slender arms round him.

Charley, she said, in a hoarse voice, you are killing me—tell me what it is.

Then he looked at her; at the sight of that sweet imploring face his courage and strength gave way. Charley Fane bowed his face upon his wife's drooping head, and wept as he had never wept before.

Tell me, darling, she whispered, what is it?—can I help you?

I am a villain, Rose, he cried, a miserable, weak villain. My wife, I cannot look at you and tell you what I have done. Your face shames me. If I had listened to you—if I had but listened to you, Rose.

She did not speak; with one gentle hand she smoothed the chestnut hair that had fallen over his brow; she waited for his next words with a heart cold and sick with dread.

I wish I had died years ago, he cried, before I blighted your life, Rose.

She whispered to him that her life was all his own, and that she gave it to him gladly.

Tell me what is wrong, Charley, she said, gently. Though all the world fail you, I am true. Tell me that I may help you.

I cannot, even to my own wife, he replied; I cannot say the words; it seems to me, that if I give utterance to them, I am lost. There is nothing but death for me, Rose. Better than a felon's cell.

She soothed his wild ravings as good and gentle women alone can soothe those in despair. Little by little she drew from him the following story. He was going home that evening as he had promised, when he met a gentleman, a creditor of the firm, who stopped him, saying that he was just on his way to seek him. He wanted to pay an account long standing, and would call on Friday to give a large order for many things he wanted.

Your firm have told me pretty plainly said the gentleman, that I must pay one debt before I contract another. I know it will be useless to call on Friday unless I pay to-day.

They went into an hotel, where Charley, having written out a receipt, placed the money carefully in his purse and again started for home. The bank was closed, or he would have left it there as he passed. Unfortunately he met Mr. Sinclair, who persuaded him to have "one—only one" game at billiards.

It was with quivering lips Charley told the story of his shame. They began to gamble, and they played high: he lost. In the mad excitement of the moment, almost without knowing what he did, the unhappy man took out his purse containing the hundred and fifty pounds paid over to him.

I shall double it in ten minutes, he thought; in less than that he had lost it all. The shock sobered yet maddened him. He flung the money in Mr. Sinclair's face. You have won, and have ruined me! he cried.

Not ruined by the loss of such a bagatelle as this, said Mr. Sinclair, coolly counting over the bank-notes.

I cursed him for his coolness, cried Charley; I cursed myself for my wild reckless folly; nothing can save me, Rose. I am a ruined man. I will die any death rather than stand in the dock—nothing can save me. If I cannot pay the money to-morrow, Leeson will go on Friday, and then all will be known.

Her face grew white as his own, her lips quivered, her hands trembled.

Could you not borrow the money, Charley? she asked.

There is not time, he said, despairingly. I know no one who could lend me a hundred and fifty pounds at a moment's notice. I must pay the penalty. Oh, Rose, my mad folly has ruined your life and mine.

She began to fear for him, a deep burning flush covered his face, his eyes were full of a wild deep horror, for which there was no name. With gentle words she persuaded him to go to his own room. She laid him down upon a sofa there.

Charley, she said, listen to me—try to understand. I am going away, and I will not return without the money. I will get it for you.

Ah, me, it was not upon the strong man, whose deep sobs shook his whole frame, that the burden fell,—not upon him, but upon the gentle fragile wife, whose face in that moment looked heroic and sublime.

Charley, she said, bending over him, try to be calm. You sinned recklessly, not willfully; there may be mercy for us: kiss me before I go.

He touched her pure sweet face with his burning lips. She knelt by him for some minutes with bowed head, then rose calm and brave, holding as it were her husband's life and her own in her hands.

When Rose Fane passed out of the house the faint gray dawn of morning shone in the eastern sky. There was a musical hum as of birds and bees awakening; a sweet perfume as of blooming flowers sighing to the breeze; all was calm, serene, and fair—so different in the golden hush of the morning from the wretched scene she had just quitted. She looked back once at her home, the scene of her brief dream of happiness and long night of sorrow; then with a prayer on her lips, she went on the bravest, saddest errand ever imagined.

CHAPTER IV.

Paul Ashton sat alone in his office. He was not much changed. He looked older and sadder; there was a wistful, sorrowful expression in his eyes, a worn look upon his face; the smile was less frequent upon his lips, and the musical, ringing, hearty tone had gone from his voice. He had worked hard, worked to drown memory and care; yet there were times when a sweet fair face came between him and his papers—when he was deaf to all other sounds save that of a sweet, clear voice, saying, I am so sorry for you, Paul. I esteem you, but I love Charley Fane best.

He had done brave battle with his sorrow, and tried to live it down. It clung to him, even as love had done. That noble, constant nature could know no change. He could never love again. He sat on this bright June day busily engaged with his papers; yet, despite all, his thoughts would wander. That fair face would haunt him. He drove it remorselessly away, yet there were the sweet lips smiling, the dark blue eyes shining.

I must be haunted! cried Paul, in despair. Even at that moment there came a rap at the outer door.

A lady wishes to see you immediately, said the clerk.

Ask her in, said Paul, listlessly.

A lady, closely veiled, entered the office, and he rose to offer her a chair.

Pray be seated, madam, he began; but two little hands were outstretched towards him, and a faint, low voice cried, Paul, do you not know me?

Rose!—Mrs. Fane!—can it be you? said Paul, utterly bewildered.

She raised her veil, and looked at him. He had been haunted by the sweet fair face of Rose Ashleigh—he hardly recognised the one he gazed upon; it was white,—white with shame, sorrow, and despair. The smiling lips were pale and drawn, the blue eyes wild, and full of horror. This face upon which he gazed was like a shadow of the pretty, gentle girl he loved.

You told me, she said, faintly, you told me to come, if ever I wanted a friend,—I want one now.

At the sound of that voice Paul Ashton roused himself. In a moment he had placed her in the large, easy chair.

Do not trouble, Rose, he said; do not fear. If my life can serve you, you shall have it. Tell me what is wrong.

And to him, the man she had rejected, poor Rose told the story of her husband's sin and sorrow.

[CONCLUDED IN OUR NEXT.]

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